



Frequently Asked Questions INMATE MAIL

1. Why was the DOC on a statewide lockdown?

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections Secretary John Wetzel announced the immediate lockdown of all state correctional institutions on August 29, 2018, because of reports of multiple staff members being sickened by unknown substances over the past few weeks. The DOC is enacting new policies to protect staff, inmates, volunteers and everyone who visit all DOC facilities. You can view staff and inmate exposure incidents on the DOC website [HERE](#).

2. How are these dangerous, unknown substances getting into facilities?

There are seven points of entry for contraband to enter the facility: mail, legal mail, visits, staff, books/publications, drones and inmates returning to the DOC after having been released. It's speculated that the majority of contraband enters the facilities through the mail.

3. What is the DOC doing to stop unknown substances and contraband from entering its facilities through incoming mail?

The DOC is implementing several immediate policy and program changes in order to keep staff and inmates safe from the exposure of these dangerous substances. Effective immediately all incoming public mail will be processed through an offsite third party vendor called Smart Communications.

4. How will Smart Communications stop contraband from entering facilities through the mail?

Smart Communications offers a program called MailGuard™ which provides an off-site virtual mailroom that receives non-legal inmate postal mail on behalf of the correctional agency. That mail is then processed into a searchable electronic document which is then transmitted electronically to the correctional facility where it will be printed and delivered to the inmate by hand. MailGuard™ creates a 100% contraband elimination for all non-legal mail.

5. What is considered non-legal mail?

Non-legal mail is all regular incoming correspondence between inmates, family and friends. All legal mail will be sent directly to the appropriate SCI for handling/processing. More information is provided below (See questions 24, 25, and 30-32).

6. What address should the public use to send non-legal mail to an inmate now?

*Smart Communications/PA DOC
SCI
Inmate Name/Inmate Number
PO Box 33028
St Petersburg, Florida 33733*

EXAMPLE:

Smart Communications/PADOC
Joe Jones/AB1234
SCI Camp Hill
PO Box 33028
St Petersburg FL 33733

7. What mail will not be processed by Smart Communications?

Legal mail will be sent directly to the appropriate SCI and processed pursuant to the new legal mail policy. Publications will follow new procedures and should not be purchased and shipped to any SCI by third parties.

8. What happens if Smart Communications finds contraband or is exposed to these dangerous substances?

Smart Communications will search the mail for contraband and drugs and notify the institution of any finds. Staff are fully equipped with protective precautions and gear to keep them safe from dangerous exposures.

9. What happens to the original mail after it is scanned into an electronic document?

Smart Communications will keep all paper copies for 45 days upon its arrival unless otherwise instructed by the DOC.

10. What happens to the paper mail after 45 days?

At the expiration of 45 days all paper mail, unless otherwise indicated by the DOC, will be securely destroyed by Smart Communications.

11. What happens to official documents such as driver's licenses, social security cards and checks that are sent in through inmate mail?

Smart Communications will forward all original documents to the SCI business office.

12. What happens to the digital version of the mail?

All scanned mail is uploaded to a permanent, searchable database that is organized/sorted by inmate, and all digital mail is held in the database. When the electronic mail reaches the facility staff can approve, deny or forward mail to another department. Approved mail is then printed and delivered to the inmates.

13. How long is the digital mail kept on back log?

Smart Communications will keep the digital mail for seven years.

14. When will inmates receive their mail?

For the first 60-90 days from the implementation of MailGuard™ inmates will receive their mail within five days of its reception at the central processing hub. After the first 60 to 90 days inmates will receive mail within 24 hours of its reception at the central processing hub.

15. How will Smart Communications stop contraband from entering the facility through legal mail?

In this system, certified staff will open, scan and print an inmate's legal mail in front of the inmate through a Smart Communications MailGuard Legal™ cart. The cart can be stationary or mobile and it will record a video of the legal mail being scanned and printed. Videos are kept for 45 days unless otherwise indicated by the DOC. MailGuard Legal™ creates a 100% contraband elimination solution for all legal mail.

16. What happens to the original piece of legal mail?

All original legal mail will be placed in a secure bag and kept for 15 days. If no inmate grievances are submitted, mail will be destroyed.

17. Where can I get more information about Smart Communications?

The Smart Communications website is great resource of information regarding their services <https://smartcommunications.us/2017/07/14/about-us/>

18. What is the DOC doing to stop unknown substances and contraband from entering its facilities through visiting rooms?

Effective immediately, the DOC is doubling all staffing in the visiting rooms. In addition, the DOC is implementing a 90-day moratorium on photos and access to vending machines.

19. What will the DOC do after the 90-day moratorium expires?

During this 90-day period the DOC will reevaluate the visiting room procedures.

20. Are there any repercussions for visitors who violate DOC visiting room procedures?

Visitors who are caught introducing contraband into visiting rooms will receive an indefinite suspension from all DOC facilities.

21. What about inmates, will they experience repercussions for introducing contraband into a state correctional facility?

Inmates who are in possession of or test positive for drugs will receive a 6-month visit suspension for the first offense, a 12-month visit suspension for the second offense, and an indefinite-to-life visit suspension for the third offense. Suspensions do not include visits from attorneys or Official Visitors.

22. What are Official Visitors?

Official Visitors are defined by Title 61 §3512 and include certain government officials, as well as authorized members of the Pennsylvania Prison Society (PPS).

23. Do inmates have access to e-books?

By September 18, 2018, more than 8,500 e-books will be available to download on the tablets. The number of book titles will continue to expand based on inmate input/requests.

24. If inmates do not have a tablet, how can they read books?

All SCIs have libraries. We will continue to increase the number and variety of books offered in the library. Inmates may also purchase books.

25. Can third parties purchase books for inmates from publishers and book stores?

No. There will no longer be any direct purchase from publishers/ book stores by third parties.

26. How can inmates purchase actual books?

Inmates can make a request to purchase any book. The DOC will provide the inmate with the cost of the book. Once the inmate submits a cash slip for the book, the DOC will order the book and have it shipped to the inmate.

27. How will DOC purchase books?

The DOC will access many avenues to locate books, always keeping a reasonable price as a critical factor.

28. Are there limitations as to what books an inmate can order?

An inmate can request any book; however, it is still subject to content review by the Incoming Publication Review Committee, and content may not violate DC-ADM 803, "[Inmate Mail and Incoming Publications](#)."

29. Are inmates limited to the quantity of books they request/order?

The quantity of books is not limited; however, inmates must adhere to the property limitations set forth in the DC-ADM 815 "[Personal Property, State Issued Items and Commissary Outside Purchases](#)."

30. May groups still donate books?

The DOC will no longer accept books donated directly to individual inmates. The DOC is exploring options related to accepting donated books for general use in SCI libraries.

31. May family and friends purchase a book for an inmate?

Friends and family may [deposit money on an inmate's account](#) that the inmate would then use to purchase the book.

Also, the DOC is developing a public resource account in which a third party may request a book to purchase for an inmate. The DOC will provide the cost of publication and the third party can submit payment for to the DOC for the DOC to purchase the book. The DOC will ship the book to the inmate.

32. Can inmates still receive magazine and newspaper subscriptions?

Yes. All future magazine and newspaper subscriptions will be purchased through the DOC. The inmate will submit a request and cash slip. The DOC will purchase subscriptions in bulk and have magazines shipped in bulk to the SCI to deliver to inmates who purchased the item/s. Libraries also will offer more access to a variety of periodicals.

33. What happens if an inmate already has a subscription to magazine/ periodical?

Inmates will continue to receive the periodical until the subscription expires; however, if there is reason to believe the periodical has been compromised, it can be confiscated, and a confiscation slip can be provided to the inmate with the specific reason for confiscation provided. Any new subscriptions must be placed per the new policy.

34. Where can I get up to date information about the lockdown, staff exposures, and pending policy/program changes?

The [DOC website](#) has up-to-date information regarding the lockdown, staff exposures and pending policy/program changes.

09/06/2018